

Police Vol. 1.

A
P L A N
FOR PREVENTING
R O B B E R I E S
WITHIN
TWENTY MILES of LONDON.

WITH
An Account of the Rise and Establishment of
the real THIEFTAKERS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
Advice to PAWNBROKERS, STABLE-KEEPERS,
and PUBLICANS.

By JOHN FIELDING, Esq;



LONDON,
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W. M. STINE

ROBBERS

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To the P U B L I C.

TH E perjuries of M^cDaniel and his crew having raised a strong prepossession against thieftakers in general, it seems proper at this time to publish a few facts, relating to the real and useful thieftakers, whereby the public may be enabled to distinguish between those who deserve to be considered with regard and esteem, and those who are most justly the objects of contempt and indignation. As this is one of the principal ends of the following narrative, with which the plan I have proposed for preventing robberies within twenty miles of London is naturally connected, and on which, indeed, the

To the P U B L I C.

the success thereof depends ; I doubt not but it will be received with candour by that public, whose true interest will ever be the constant view of,

Their most faithful humble Servant,

JOHN FIELDING.

INTRODUCTION.

AS the method which I here intend to lay before the public, in order to prevent highway robberies within twenty miles of London, is founded on the same principles with that made use of in town, viz. quick notice and sudden pursuit; and as both will generally be executed by the same instruments, namely, the real thieftakers; it will, I apprehend, be necessary to give some account of their establishment, and of the means by which they were reduced to a regular body.

The winter after the late Henry Fielding Esq; came to Bow-Street, the town was infested by a daring gang of robbers, who attacked several persons of fashion, and gave a general alarm through the City and the liberty of Westminster; and as that magistrate then enjoyed a good share of health, he spirited up the civil power, and sent several bodies of constables, with the advantage of having Mr. Welch at their head, into different parts of the town, by whose bravery and activity those disturbers of the peace were quickly apprehended and brought to justice: and though, the year after, most of these constables were out of office, yet some of them, being actuated by a truly public spirit

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against thieves, and being encouraged by the said magistrate, continued their diligence, and were always ready, on being summoned, to go in pursuit of villains. The next winter furnished them with sufficient occasions to try their courage; when Mr. William Pentlow and Mr. Peele, then constables, particularly distinguished themselves, having taken one Lewis in a very remarkable manner, by whose information the whole gang was apprehended. The keeper of New Prison dying soon after, the justices, as a reward for Mr. Pentlow's public services, gave him that place, which he has now enjoyed four years, and in that time has brought several villains to justice, and still continues to act with such vigilance, that no longer ago than last sessions, he was honoured with the thanks of the justices at Hicks's-Hall, for his bravery in attacking, assisted by Mr. Gee a constable, the notorious Burk and Gill, even though Mr. Pentlow and Gee were unarmed, and Burk and Gill had each a pistol in his hand, one of which was fired in Mr. Gee's face.

This encouragement of merit induced several constables and other persons to serve the public in the same way: and as soon as Mr. Fielding was enabled by the government to put his plan in execution, whatever constables appeared willing to go on these hazardous enterprizes, were occasionally employed,

ployed, together with a set of brave fellows, who had before entered the list ; to whose services the public is much indebted. All of these had served the office of constable, except one, a Marshalsea-court officer, and consequently used to the apprehending of common debtors, who are generally of the desperate kind ; so that the real thieftakers must all have been housekeepers, and reputable ones too, otherwise they could not have been nominated to serve the office of constable in their respective parishes : and as often as the year comes round, and they are discharged from their offices, some of the bravest of them generally enter the other list, and are ready on all occasions to obey the directions of the acting magistrate.

Now when it is considered, that by this means the acting magistrate, besides having the whole civil power within his jurisdiction at command, can every day, upon notice given of any robbery, outrage, or other violence committed, call together a number of such brave and reputable men, always ready to pursue and attack the most daring villain, a real thieftaker must be esteemed a valuable servant of the society. Let us only look back on that terrible Irish gang, consisting of thirteen persons, which infested the town about the time that Lord Harrington's cook was murdered, and recollect that all these villains were brought to justice by the real

thieftakers, all persons who had served the office of constable : that the great Mr. Parry, who had struck terror into all the squares about St. James's, fell a victim to the resolution of these men, as did several other street-robbers afterwards ; and lastly, Walsh, Armstrong, Courtney, and the two desperadoes Gill and Burk : that the persons who shot at and wounded Colonel Schutz, were taken by a pickt party of constables, who seized the bold Mr. Fleming, and several others for the highway.

This, therefore, may serve to shew, that so long as the spirit of the civil power is preserved by proper encouragements, the public will never want such thieftakers as one would wish should be employed ; and though now and then a single street-robber or house-breaker may be successful, yet it will be always impossible for a number of them to form themselves into a gang.

Indeed, it was the advantages received by these persons, as the just rewards of their diligence, that tempted McDaniel and his hellish crew, to prostitute the useful employment of a thieftaker, to the procuring both public and private rewards, at the shameful and shocking price of innocent blood.

And that the subscriptions, raised by the gentlemen about London to prevent robberies,

beries, added to this temptation, is clear from the scheme practised in relation to the sham robbery committed on Salmon at Blackheath.

To remove this temptation, by altering the nature of the subscriptions, is the intention of the following proposal.

But before I open it, as I have mentioned M^cDaniel and his gang, I take the liberty to assure the world that neither he, Berry, Salmon, Egan or Blee, were ever to my knowledge employed by my late brother, or myself, in any shape whatever; nay, so far from it, that I remember this very M^cDaniel came some years ago wounded to my brother, and swore he had been robbed and shot at by two persons whom he produced; and though he swore positively to them and the fact, yet that magistrate conceived so ill an opinion of the prosecutor in the course of his examination, that the prisoners, though charged with a capital offence, were both admitted to bail, to the great satisfaction of his grace the late duke of Richmond, and several gentlemen then present, and were afterwards acquitted at the Old Bailey.

Another circumstance that may serve to shew the very bad opinion which Mr. Field-

ing had conceived of these people was, that this very Blee, who was evidence against McDaniel and the rest, came to Mr. Fielding, soon after His Majesty's proclamation of an hundred pounds for the apprehending of street-robbers was published, and offered to make an information, nay, brought an information drawn up, in which it was set forth, that McDaniel and others had obtained two hundred and eighty pounds, as rewards for hanging two innocent men; and the reason he gave for making this information was, "that they had used him ill:" but Mr. Fielding had so very bad an opinion of Blee and his accomplices, that he ordered the former to be turned out of his house, and would have nothing to do with the latter. But when he laid his plan to prevent robberies before the right honourable the Privy Council, he gave the wickedness of this particular set of men as a reason against the publishing any future rewards, by way of proclamation, for the apprehending of thieves, in order to take away from these wretches their only temptation to perjury and murder. Indeed it was owing to this representation, that these kind of rewards have not been published since, except in one instance only.

Having thus shewn the cause and means of forming a regular body of real and honest
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thieftakers, I proceed to a scheme naturally connected therewith, and dependant upon it, namely,

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FOR PREVENTING

R O B B E R I E S

Within TWENTY MILES of LONDON.

THAT there are more highway robberies committed in one year within twenty miles of London, than in any other part of the kingdom, or perhaps in the whole kingdom besides, will, I believe, be allowed ; and that not one in a hundred of these robbers are taken in the fact, is no less astonishing than true ; especially when we consider that, within this distance from London, there is scarce a mile without a town or village, and that there are always numbers of people passing and repassing on these public roads. Were there any possibility of these pages living longer than an advertisement, I am afraid I should hardly be believed

lieved in the following true story ; but, luckily for me, the chief actor in the scene is now alive. A captain of the guards was some-time ago robbed on Hounslow Heath in a post-chaise, and the moment the highwayman left him, disengaged one of the horses, and pursued the robber ; and who will believe it ? though he drove him through a public town at noon-day, crying out highwayman ! highwayman ! both being in full view of the populace, yet no one join'd the pursuit, more than if all the inhabitants had been interested in the highwayman's escape. That these kind of robberies have been very frequent, and very disagreeable to the gentlemen who live at a small distance from town, will appear from the pains they have taken, and the many subscriptions they have set on foot, to cause these highwaymen to be apprehended ; but, very unluckily, such subscriptions, instead of being an encouragement to honest men, of bold and daring spirits, to pursue, attack, and apprehend robbers, have been a temptation to a body of villains, who disgrace human nature, to contrive robberies, and to make robbers, in order to destroy the latter for the sake of the reward ; like their master, the devil himself, who first tempts to sin, then punishes, and lastly, feasts on the wickedness he has occasioned.

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I believe, when these subscriptions were first proposed, it was not thought there were men capable of converting them to such abominably shameful and horrid purposes: but as that is become an evil which was intended as a remedy, and the remedy is grown worse than the disease, I have taken the liberty to offer a small alteration in these subscriptions, which would, I apprehend, make them fully answer the end proposed, and put them out of the reach of abuse.

But it may perhaps be thought proper previously to establish the following facts, *viz.* 1st, That those persons who rob upon the highway, within twenty miles of London, set out from thence for that purpose; 2dly, That they ride hired horses; 3dly, That they retire thither for shelter; 4thly, That they are generally taken in town; and lastly, that there is a plan fixt in town, and supported by the government, for the apprehending of robbers; in which, if the public do but perform their part, by giving immediate notice of any robbery to that magistrate, who, from experience of its use, daily solicits it by a standing advertisement, it must be impossible for villains ever to escape justice long. The public are desired once more to take notice, that those persons who are entrusted with the execution of this plan,

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and are commonly stiled thieftakers, are all of them housekeepers, men of tried courage, pickt from among the peace-officers; and moreover, that the moment any one of them commits an act either of cruelty or injustice, he is immediately discharged by the magistrate from the office of thieftaker, and never admitted again.

There are two circumstances relating to these persons, equally deserving of attention, as they render them the properest people in the world for the purpose, viz. 1st, As they have been constables before they were thieftakers, and have been called upon by the magistrates to search houses of bad fame, and take up idle and disorderly persons, they are by that means become acquainted with the bad part of the populace, and their houses of resort: in a word, every man that seems to dress above his circumstances, that occasionally mixes in alehouses, and whose way of living is not known, never misses being inquired after by the persons abovementioned. The fate of Fleming, the late highwayman, who was supposed to have subsisted three or four years by the road, is a proof of the truth of this observation; for it was a description of his way of life, told as matter of conversation to Mr. Pentlow, keeper of New Prison, that was the occasion of his being apprehended. 2dly, As magistrates
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are often obliged to admit a robber as an evidence, in order to apprehend the gang, who, after the conviction of his confederates, is constantly discharged, and as constantly returns to his former courses; such an evidence, I say, being first apprehended either by the constable or thieftaker, is consequently well known to them, and their eye is always upon him, expecting, as it generally happens, that by the next sessions after the execution of his comrades, he will become the captain of a gang of his own raising. Indeed, after a man has appeared at the Old Bailey as an evidence, he does not, when he is discharged, find a very easy admission among the industrious part of society; and the motive of his turning evidence being rather the fear of death than remorse for his guilt, there is very little hope of his reformation under the circumstances abovementioned. To this may be added, that commonly the greatest rogue in the gang turns evidence. Is it not a pity then, that there is not some provision made for these outcasts, in order to prevent their doing farther mischief themselves, after they have served the public by discovering other criminals? I am of opinion that if, instead of being pardoned, they were to be transported for a certain term, to break them of their haunts, and to inure them to a life of labour; nay, if they were to be sent abroad

for life, it would be an equal; if not a greater inducement to them to impeach their accomplices.

Now as to the plan which I have to propose :

Let any number of gentlemen, for instance twenty, whose country houses are situated at different distances, from five to twenty miles from London, subscribe two guineas each, which makes the sum of forty guineas, to be lodged in the hands of one of the subscribers, whom they shall appoint treasurer. Let this money be subject to the draughts of all the subscribers, as they shall severally have occasion to employ it ; and if any highway robbery be committed in the neighbourhood of any of these subscribers, let the first that hears of it obtain an exact description of the robber, his horse, (if he had one) and whatever is taken from the person robbed : this let him put in writing, always adding, if possible, the name and place of abode of the party robbed ; for it sometimes happens, when a highwayman is apprehended, that the prosecutor not being to be found, the former escapes justice, and is let loose again upon the public. Next let a man and horse be immediately hired, and dispatched to Mr. Fielding, in Bow-Street, Covent-Garden, with full authority to that gen-

gentleman to advertise the same in what manner he thinks proper, and to receive of the treasurer of the subscription the expence of the advertisements. Mean time let the messenger communicate to all the bye ale-houses, public inns, and turnpikes in his way to and from London, the said robbery, with a verbal description of the man and horse: the more suddenly and quickly this notice is given, the surer is the success. On the messenger's returning to the subscriber who sent him, and producing a testimony from the justice of his having delivered to him the said description, and setting forth the hour of his arrival in town, the subscriber shall give the messenger a draught upon the treasurer for such a sum of money, as he shall think his time, trouble, diligence, and expedition deserve: and on such occasions honest men will always be found ready enough, on being paid for their trouble, without any other reward, to go on such a message, though, perhaps, they would not chuse to run any hazard of their persons by attacking a rogue in desperate circumstances. Nay, it has often happened to my brother and myself, that by bestowing a shilling or half a crown on a messenger, without which he would not have stirred one step, more service has been done to the public, than has accrued from advertising rewards of an hundred pounds; but

but when notice is given immediately, the expences on the first instance are trifling; and the messenger, the informer, and apprehender are three different persons, all equally useful, but the two first are the cheapest, because the least dangerous offices. And if any subscriber should hear that highwaymen, housebreakers, or any other species of robbers, lie lurking in his neighbourhood, let him hire a sufficient number of persons to pursue and apprehend him or them, and pay them by draughts on the treasurer as before: but this, perhaps, in the country he might find some difficulty to do.

There is one thing that would, in some respect, make this plan perfect, and in which a very large body of men in this metropolis might render themselves very useful to society; I mean the pawnbrokers, alehouse-keepers, and stable-keepers who let horses to hire. There is, indeed, no authority to oblige these persons to perform their parts; yet I should imagine, that when they come to consider that their own reputation, or, what is still of more weight, their interest, is highly concerned in their being active in this scheme, they would do the same things for their particular benefit, which the law requires every individual to do for the good of the whole. There is nothing

thing more true than that these persons, nay, indeed, all persons, act with a view to their own interest, and that their differing in opinion arises from their mistaking, not neglecting, that interest. First, as to pawnbrokers, it would be needless to mention the inconveniencies they suffer from taking in stolen goods ; and I am sure it would be unnecessary to tell them, that when a shoe-black brings a diamond ring to pawn, there is great reason to suspect he did not come honestly by it. I shall therefore confine myself to that part of their conduct, in which they are supposed to be least on their guard, in order to remedy an error they frequently fall into, from the fear of having actions brought against them. With respect to this, I would have every pawnbroker know, that wherever there is sufficient cause to stop goods on suspicion of their being stolen, the very same cause will justify their stopping the party, and carrying him before a justice ; and that the latter without the former, is not only useless, but unwarrantable ; and I should ever advise this practice in pawnbrokers, 'till any one shews me he has suffered by it. But, as the remedy of one evil often begets another, so has it happened in this case ; for some pawnbrokers having lately stopt several watches that had been taken by street-robbers, and on the highway, this has taught the thieves to be more cunning,

ning, and to sell their watches and other goods to wandering Jews, who, to do them justice, will buy any thing they can get a penny by, though they saw it stolen but the very moment before. The late street-robbers generally left their watches at alehouses for their reckoning, and when once they were pledged there, they were obliged to eat and drink them out. To the alehouse-keepers, therefore, I would speak one word, as the good government of the common people depends greatly on the regulation of their houses : and indeed I wonder, that as keeping an alehouse is not only a reputable, but an advantageous business, some of them are not more cautious in preserving that order and good conduct which is the condition of their licences : above all, I would have them to avoid taking in pledges for drink ; for if a man wants to raise money on any part of his property, let him go to a pawnbroker, whose experience acquired in trade teaches him to know whether that is likely to be the man's property or not. It is likewise a dangerous thing for publicans to appear, in order to give characters at the Old Bailey of men who stand indicted for capital offences, merely because they used their houses. In a word, as it must ever be the interest of alehouse-keepers to detect rogues of all kinds, I hope their best endeavours to do it will never be wanting, and that when-
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ever they are sent for on such occasions by magistrates, they will always attend with chearfulness, and not put them to the disagreeable necessity of using harsher means than a messenger. Lastly, as to stable-keepers, and those who let horses to hire, I dare say they know that when a highwayman is taken upon their horse, such horse is forfeited to the captor ; whoever, therefore, lets a horse to a stranger, hazards the losing that horse for the sake of getting five shillings. Moreover, I will tell them a secret, which some of them don't know, viz. the three highwaymen last brought before me kept their horses out several days, though they came themselves to London every night, put up their horses, and lay themselves at an inn some distance from the owner's house. Now if a highwayman were taken in this situation, the horse would be forfeited, as much as if he had been apprehended on the road ; and it would be a very good caution to a stable-keeper never to let a horse to a man whom he does not know, unless he comes recommended by some person of reputation, whom he does know ; and upon all occasions to book the name of the hirer, the road and distance he is going, the day of the month he sets out, with the colour and marks of the horse he rides ; and if a stranger offers more than a common

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price, there is the more reason to suspect his purpose.

Now the peculiar use that I would make of these three bodies of men, is as follows. It is I suppose pretty generally known, that there is a daily paper called *THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER*, fixt for the advertizing of robberies of all kinds : in that paper, therefore, alehouse-keepers will see the descriptions of the persons of all highwaymen ; there, likewise, stable-keepers will see the exact description of highwaymen's horses, and of those horses also that are stolen ; and pawnbrokers will there find an exact account of goods in general that are taken on the highway, and otherways stolen. If therefore these three sets of people would constantly take in and read this paper, the first would never harbour a rogue without his knowledge ; the second would never furnish a highwayman with a horse, without knowing it time enough to detect him, and save the horse ; and as to the latter, they have already found so many advantages from this paper, as to need no other recommendation of it.

Having nothing more to add to this plan, (if so plain and trifling a thing deserves that name) I think it would not be altogether
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unnecessary to consider the objections that may be brought against it; for objections there certainly are, which, if I do not discover myself, will, I am persuaded, be soon pointed out by the ingenious criticks of this very critical age, at whose tremendous bar I now presume to appear: but in order to save my judges some trouble, I will make a species of confession, and by turning commentator on my own works, rob them of the opportunity of abusing the public's

Most faithful,

And obedient humble Servant,

John Fielding.

A few Criticisms on the above Plan.

FIRST CRITIC.

THIS I think might as well have been called any thing else as a plan. Indeed when I read Mr. Fielding's advertisement, I must confess I expected to see some ingenious performance; but *parturiunt montes*, may very justly be applied here, for this is the simplest and most trifling thing I ever saw.

CULPRIT.

The more it partakes of simplicity, the easier I apprehend it will be executed; and the more trifling it is, *i. e.* the less there is to do, there will be the more probability of its being done, and the expence of its execution will be so much the less. If therefore it should answer the purpose as well near London, as it does in town, and in all probability it will do so, for the same causes are very apt to produce the same effects, then will this first critic be mistaken.

SECOND CRITIC.

Methinks I hear Mr. M^cDaniel say, that this must be a damn'd plan indeed, seeing it offers no reward.

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CULPRIT.

Then it offers no temptation for perjury.

THIRD CRITIC.

I suppose the author's interest is much concerned in the success of the PUBLIC ADVERTISER, otherwise he would not recommend it so strongly.

CULPRIT.

The author has no share in that paper, though his brother had : but the true reasons for his pointing out this paper, are, 1st, Because many of the pawnbrokers, and a great number of alehouse-keepers originally agreed to take it in ; 2dly, Because it is pretty well known to be the paper in which robberies in general, and most stolen goods, are advertised ; and lastly, because the managers of this paper constantly preserve a vacancy to the last hour, in order to insert any occurrence of public utility, and never refuse any advertisement of robberies that I send, whether long or short ; but rather leave out a trifling particular advertisement, than run the hazard of stopping the progress of public justice. On the other hand, I must declare that I have frequently had advertisements refused, and others delayed, by the proprietors of another

ther Advertiser, though I have carried them myself, and assured them of the necessity of such and such circumstances being immediately made public. However, I must desire that if any advantage either from this paper, or from any of my endeavours to serve the public, should accrue to me, none would presume to be pleased at it, but those who think my labour deserves encouragement.

FOURTH CRITIC.

Would not the raising the hue and cry in the country, be a more effectual method of apprehending thieves, as it has the sanction of authority, than any private subscription whatever?

CULPRIT.

At a greater distance from London, I acknowledge it would, and verily believe that if the method of raising hue and cry, together with the penalties upon peace-officers for the neglect of this important duty, was made universally known, by being published in a short manner and clear light, once every month in all the evening papers, for a year together, it would make this part of their office as easy and familiar to them as any other whatever, and render it absolutely impossible for any villain in the country to

escape justice ; but near London I apprehend it would lose its effect, not only from the vast variety of passengers on the road, mounted and dressed alike ; but if they should not succeed before the rogue reaches London, seeking him there, by means of the hue and cry, would be fruitless indeed. The different effects of a hue and cry near town, and of the notice mentioned in my plan, was the other day proved, much to the advantage of the latter ; for a gentleman in Essex was, a few weeks ago, robbed by a single highwayman within a mile of his own house, and about ten miles from London ; upon which he went before a magistrate, made an information, and raised the hue and cry, in despite of which the highwayman lay all night about fourteen miles distant on the straight road, and returned to London the next morning the same way, without any molestation or hindrance whatever : but the gentleman being more active than persons generally are on such occasions, sent out his servants, and having procured as exact descriptions of him and his horse, and other circumstances, as he could, he brought them to Mr. Fielding, and in three hours time a plan was formed from those circumstances, which made his escape impossible, and in about eight and forty hours he fell into the trap, and is now in safe custody.

FIFTH

FIFTH CRITIC.

If these real thieftakers, as the author is pleased to stile them, are men of any reputation, why are not their names and places of abode published, that their characters may be inquired into, and the public not put to the necessity of taking the author's bare word for the truth of his own assertion?

CULPRIT.

As the thieftakers are extremely obnoxious to the common people, perhaps it might not be altogether politic to point them out to the mob; and the less they are known, the better able they will always be to execute the purposes of their institution: besides, as they are annually increased by the discharge of constables, it might deter them from this useful office, by injuring them in their respective trades; but as one of them lately lost his life in his duty, *viz.* by taking Burk and Gill, and is consequently out of the reach of any farther injury, I shall not conceal his name, as its being known may, in this generous kingdom, be of some service to the two children he has left behind him. His name then was Hind, and his chief employment that of deputy-governor of Tothill-fields Bridewell, where he farmed the tap and labour of that prison, and carried on a manu-

manufacture of chopping rags for the making of paper, which made that Bridewell of great use in employing disorderly persons committed thither, and prevented them from spending their time in wickedness and debauchery, the too common practice of prisoners in other Bridewells in this kingdom. His having the care of a prison, made him also very useful in relation to the discovering of thieves ; for as most highwaymen keep company with bad women, who generally spend half the year in the Bridewells about town, they have often impeached their paramours ; and persons committed for small offences, have every now and then been the means of destroying gangs of housebreakers, shoplifters, and street-robbers.

Lastly, If any person who is more likely to be an encourager, than the game of a thieftaker, has curiosity to know all their names and places of abode, Mr. Fielding will very readily communicate them, having no intention of concealing any thing that ought, for the good of the public, to be made known.

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